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# AEGIS

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ARCHAEOLOGY

PRESENTED TO MATTI EGON

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**edited by**

**Zetta Theodoropoulou Polychroniadis  
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THE FOUNDER OF GACUK MATTI EGON WITH THE 'UNUSUAL BOUQUET' OFFERED BY THE SCHOLARS.



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# **‘What would the world be to us if the children were no more?’:<sup>1</sup> the archaeology of children and death in LH IIIC Greece**

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## **Introduction**

Although the presence of children in the archaeological record is now widely accepted,<sup>2</sup> the study of children and childhood in prehistoric Greece is often marginalised: little attention is still paid to it in academic circles. Research on Aegean childhood to date has perceived children as ‘little adults rather than human beings and individuals living in a present’<sup>3</sup> and has focused either on aspects of their material culture, of constructions of age and gender, or their connection to the adult world — meaning almost exclusively their relationship to their mothers. Thus, there is still much scope for investigating children in the Aegean archaeological record by means of trans-discipline awareness and inter-disciplinary working.<sup>4</sup>

The study of Mycenaean children and childhood is indeed a rather difficult subject, as archaeologists can only turn to a very few iconographic depictions, Linear B records and child-related archaeological contexts, mostly infant/child burials.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the scarcity of children in the iconographic repertoire and the summarising administrative character of the Linear B records regarding child labour, archaeologists encounter a further series of serious drawbacks that may be summarised as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- i. the earlier scholarly bias against an archaeology of children and childhood in the Aegean, which has resulted in a dearth of properly published child-related contexts;
- ii. the greater susceptibility of child skeletons to complete decay and the relative lack of systematic anthropological and scientific analyses<sup>7</sup> of child skeletal remains;
- iii. the collective character of Mycenaean burials and the practice of the secondary burial, which involved the removal of and ritual interference with skeletal remains, and subsequently their re-arrangement within or outside the tomb;

- iv. an uneven distribution of Mycenaean child burials in regional and chronological terms,<sup>8</sup> the exclusion of children from formal cemeteries (in particular during the Early Mycenaean period), and — on occasions — the total absence of funerary goods associated with infant/child burials.

LH IIIC Greece provides an excellent case-study for the treatment of prehistoric children at death. The 12th century BC is a period that witnessed the aftermath of the collapse of the Mycenaean palatial administration, with major socio-political, economic and cultural changes. Local communities were completely disrupted and resettled; as a consequence, funerary customs and rituals were radically reframed.<sup>9</sup> In this socio-political turbulence, children became very important in the strategies of descent, lineage and kinship. This study provides an archaeological insight into the rites associated with infant/child death and burial in LH IIIC Greece and thereby to reconstruct the response of the adult community to the death of a child in the 12th century BC.<sup>10</sup>

## **A child’s final resting place: child tombs and burials in LH IIIC Greece**

Children are generally under-represented in the LH mortuary record, especially during the EMyc, LH IIIC and SubMyc phases.<sup>11</sup> For example, child burials count for only 13% of the entire burials at Perati.<sup>12</sup> A good indication though of the high mortality rate of children is provided by LH IIIC tomb 4 at Pylona on Rhodes, where an adult male, a young adult female (17–25 years old), a newborn and 7 infants and children (from 18 months to 9 or 10 years of age) were buried.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the poem ‘*Children*’ by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the seminal studies by Lillehammer (1989 and 2000) and Kamp (2001).

<sup>3</sup> To quote Lillehammer’s own words for the state of archaeological research on children and childhood in general (2010, 16).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Crawford and Lewis 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The archaeological study of children and childhood in LBA Greece is the focus of the author’s new research project ‘Tiny Archaeologies: The World of Children in Mycenaean Greece’ at the University of Nottingham.

<sup>6</sup> Gallou 2004, 365; Gallou 2010, 162ff.

<sup>7</sup> Lebegyev 2009, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Gallou 2004, 366–367.

<sup>9</sup> Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Due to the limitations imposed on the word limit of this paper only few selected examples are included in the analysis. Many more instructive examples are included in the author’s forthcoming monograph on LBA children and childhood.

<sup>11</sup> Dickinson 1977, 59; Voutsaki 1993, 78; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 129; Lewartowski 2000, 19; Papathanassiou 2002–2005, 193, 196; Georgiadis 2003, 78; Gallou 2004, 366–367; Paschalidis and McGeorge 2009, 102. For the exclusion and/or incorporation of infants and children in Mycenaean cemeteries, see Voutsaki 1993, 94ff; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 121ff.; Lewartowski 2000, 23, 24; Gallou 2004, 370–371; Muskett 2009, 42–43; Lebegyev 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Iakovides 1970, 65–67.

<sup>13</sup> Karantzali 2001, 18–19; McGeorge 2001, 89–90. See also Georgiadis 2003, 78.

Two types of grave contexts can be distinguished for infants and children during the post-palatial period, namely

- i. *extramural*: where burial takes place in organised cemeteries of tholoi and/or chamber tombs, pits and cist graves, and shaft graves outside the habitation area;
- ii. *intramural*: where burial is performed in simple graves either within the inhabited area, inside or between houses, or outside but close to the habitation area, sometimes in the ruins of abandoned structures. In the latter case, the simple graves form small grave groups.

### 1. Extramural burials

In LH IIIC times children were buried in family vaults (tholoi and chamber tombs), or in graves (including chamber tombs) exclusively reserved for them in organised cemeteries, or grave groups. Simple graves (pit, cist and shaft) were found dispersed among chamber tombs, or in cemeteries comprising only such tombs. More specifically,

- i. *tholos tombs*: Only a few children, most probably young members of local elites, received burial, either in specially reserved spaces (pits, cists, side chamber) or directly on the floor of the chamber in tholos tombs dating to the Early Mycenaean and LH IIIA–B phases.<sup>14</sup> Despite the total absence of skeletal remains, Polychronakou-Sgouritsa has argued that the discovery of Psi-figurines in pit 1 in tholos 239 (alongside three skeletons) at Medeon, and in grave V in tholos B at Pteleon may be taken as evidence for LH IIIB/C child burials.<sup>15</sup>
- ii. *chamber tombs*: As with the tholoi, children have rarely been reported in LH I–II chamber tombs, but numbers increase in LH III.<sup>16</sup> The case of the cemetery at Perati in Attica is informative:<sup>17</sup> here infant/child burials have been identified in 67 tombs at the cemetery, without any specific pattern of clustering.<sup>18</sup> Twenty-three chamber tombs were exclusively used for children;<sup>19</sup> these tombs featured either small *dromoi* and chambers (tombs 19, 20, 26, 50, 51, 66, 116, 129 and 144) or small chambers and average-sized *dromoi* (tombs 102,

120, 126, 132). At Perati, the little bodies were deposited either directly on the floor in the centre of the main burial chamber or near the entrance (e.g. tombs 147, 145 and 131<sup>20</sup>), and/or in niches sealed with dry-stone walling in the chamber (tomb 78; the floor of the niche, which lay 1 m above the floor of the main chamber, was strewn with sea pebbles)<sup>21</sup> and in the *dromos* (e.g. tombs 33a, 43a, 43b, 43γ, 46a, 78, 103a, Σ14a, σ23a, 50, 52, and 57a)<sup>22</sup>. Children were also deposited in small pits or cists in the chamber, e.g. Perati.<sup>23</sup> At Tanagra, terracotta larnakes were used for the primary deposition of infant/child burials within the chamber, e.g. tomb 6.<sup>24</sup> Primary infant/child inhumations have also been deposited in niches in the *dromos* of the tomb, e.g. Gortsoulia near Mycenae<sup>25</sup> and Tombs Γ and possibly E at Kamini, Naxos.<sup>26</sup>

- iii. *single graves*: In a number of cases, children were interred in simple graves that were dispersed among chamber or tholos tombs. At Perati, the shallow infant pit graves 29, 44 and 54 were directly associated with chamber tombs.<sup>27</sup> The small child pit graves 7, 67, 68 and 79 featured schematic *dromoi* cut into one side, or one end.<sup>28</sup> The floor of graves 67 and 68 was covered with pebbles,<sup>29</sup> whereas grave 95 which accommodated an infant burial featured a floor of beaten earth and gravel.<sup>30</sup> Grave 7 was attached to tomb Σ18, but the others were located near the top of the cemetery, adjacent to the simpler pit graves.<sup>31</sup> A child burial was deposited in cist grave 2 at Thebes, near the Electraean Gates.<sup>32</sup>

### 2. Intramural graves<sup>33</sup>

It is not always easy to define groups of intramural graves: the actual location of such graves in relation to the

<sup>14</sup> Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 10–11; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 11. For individual tomb reports, see Vatin 1969, 29–30 (Medeon); Verdelis 1952, 179, figs. 178, 180 (no 4) (Pteleos).

<sup>16</sup> Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 65–67 for a summary of the relevant evidence.

<sup>18</sup> In some cases the child's skeleton had completely disintegrated; child burials were distinguished on the basis of the offerings (Cavanagh and Mee 2009, 175–176). See also Iakovidis 1970, 65–66; Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 10–11; Thomatos 2006, 159, 168.

<sup>19</sup> Tombs 26, 66, 64, 94, 140, Σ59, 37, 19, 20, 22, 18, 102, 116, 117, 120, 126 and 187. Tombs 87, 144 and 48 date to the transitional LH IIIB–IIICe period (Iakovidis 1969, 26, 68–68, 116, 150–151, 229, 243, 249–250, 324, 330, 331, 341, 342, 346–347, 413, 414, 437, 446; Iakovidis 1970, 67). Another interesting example is chamber tomb Δ at the Achaia Klausea cemetery which held the burial of a 4-and-a-half years old child furnished with two small stirrup jars and a duck-shaped vessel (Paschalidis and McGeorge 2009, 96).

<sup>20</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 118–119, 133, 453. See also, for example, tomb 10 at Thebes, Agia Anna (Keramopoulos 1917, 146), Mycenae tomb 515 (Wace 1932, 56) and Phychtia (Verdelis 1964, 120).

<sup>21</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 60, 62; Iakovidis 1970, 14. A similar contemporary example has been reported from chamber tomb Γ at Alyki (Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 13 and fn. 52).

<sup>22</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Spyropoulos 1969, 10; Spyropoulos 1970, 186–187. Earlier evidence for the deposition of infants/children in terracotta sarcophagi has been uncovered in tomb XXVII at Prosymna (LH IIIA; Blegen 1937, 54, 269) and tomb 1 at Vraserka (Demakopoulou 1987, 70–72).

<sup>25</sup> Mylonas 1966, 68, fig. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Thomatos 2006, 162–163.

<sup>27</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 17–18, 373, 374, 379. These graves contained funerary gifts but no skeletal remains. Iakovidis assumed that the fragile immature bones had dissolved completely. Only grave 29 was found covered with slabs.

<sup>28</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 100–101, 380. Graves 67 and 68 were slab-covered. The entrance to grave 79 was blocked with dry-stone masonry. Pit grave XI.B in the Athenian Agora, which accommodated a LH IIIA–B child burial, features a similar plan (cf. Immerwahr 1971, 195).

<sup>29</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 205.

<sup>31</sup> Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Keramopoulos 1917, 25.

<sup>33</sup> The topic of infant intramural burials in the Aegean Bronze Age, with reference to parallel practices in Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt, has been recently treated by McGeorge (2013).

settlement's boundaries may be uncertain.<sup>34</sup> Such graves occur singly or in small groups, beside or beneath houses, or in some temporarily abandoned part of the habitation area.<sup>35</sup> For example, at Lefkandi, Xeropolis, fourteen infant, child and adolescent burials were placed in small under-floor pits, most of them close to the walls of rooms in the settlement, and covered with fragments of pithoi or coarse jars.<sup>36</sup> The custom of burying children in cist graves below the floor of the houses was practised too at Pyrgos Livanates (Kynos) in the late phase of LH IIIC.<sup>37</sup> The LH IIIC and PG intramural adult and child graves at Mitrou were clustered in groups within the ruins of earlier buildings.<sup>38</sup> LH IIIC infant/child graves have been uncovered in Houses L and S at Agios Kosmas.<sup>39</sup> An infant was most probably interred in a pit (or a natural cavity) in the area of the Cult Centre at Mycenae.<sup>40</sup> Noteworthy is the isolated phenomenon of the long series of unfurnished adult and child burials in the Lower Citadel at Tiryns, dating to the transitional LH IIIB2–LH IIICe.<sup>41</sup> At Agios Stephanos, only four burials could be assigned with certainty to the early phase of LH IIIC, namely HS Zeta3 (newborn baby), HS Beta20 (toddler), HS Beta22 (infant) and HS Beta23 (infant).<sup>42</sup> They are not clearly associated with any grave type and were deposited against or adjacent to building walls; HS Beta20 might have been surrounded by some stones. Finally, the custom of pot-burial, which had been common in MH times, was revived in the last phase of LH IIIC, but without ever becoming popular, e.g. Mesopotamos, Xylokastró,<sup>43</sup> Argos and possibly Mycenae.<sup>44</sup>

### A painful moment: placing the child in the grave

Inhumation appears to have been the preferred mode for the burial of infants and children since EMyc times, both intramurally and extramurally. At Perati children and adults were mostly placed on their backs with their knees drawn-up. In other tombs, infants/children were placed in a supine and flexed (or semi-flexed) position with the arms arranged in various ways.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the child depicted on the larnax from tomb 3 at Tanagra looks to have had her arms crossed across her chest. Lewartowski has noted that there appears to be a consistent pattern in the positioning of infants/children in simple graves since the EMyc period, i.e. the proportion of supine postures to side postures is almost equal during the EMyc–LH

IIIC periods, with changes witnessed only during the SubMyc.<sup>46</sup> The extended and contracted posture appears to be more frequent during the main palatial and LH IIIC periods with a preference shown towards the deposition of children on their sides, as opposed to its uncommonness in adult interments.<sup>47</sup> Occasionally, the child's head rested on a pile of stones or on a stone slab.<sup>48</sup>

There are also few occasions where a child and an adult were laid to rest simultaneously,<sup>49</sup> e.g. tombs 56, 90 and 141 at Perati,<sup>50</sup> chamber tomb E in the Achaea Klauss cemetery,<sup>51</sup> at Tanagra<sup>52</sup> and the cist grave from Ephra.<sup>53</sup> The adult in the burial is traditionally identified as the mother of the child, but how can one rule out the possibility of the grown-up being another close relative of the child, e.g. the sister or the grandmother,<sup>54</sup> who unfortunately died at the same time as the child due to illness or accident?

Infant/child cremations form only a tiny proportion in the LH IIIC mortuary record<sup>55</sup>; instructive examples have been identified at Perati, Argos, Chania at Mycenae and Elateia, Alonaki,<sup>56</sup> among a few other sites. At Perati a 5 year old child (in tomb 1 alongside other adult cremations and burial offerings) and two adolescents (in tombs 46 and 122) were cremated.<sup>57</sup> The cremated remains of the adolescent in tomb 46 were most probably placed in a small heap on the floor of the chamber,<sup>58</sup> whereas the remains of the adolescent in tomb 22 were placed with those of a mature adult individual in a shallow and uncovered pit near the back wall of the chamber.<sup>59</sup> Both adolescent cremations were probably deposited unfurnished, unless perishable goods only were offered with them.

The excavation of a tumulus in the Katsabelos plot at Tripolis Street in Argos brought to light twenty cremation vessels that contained adult burials and another eight that

<sup>46</sup> Lewartowski 2000, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Lewartowski 2000, 21–22.

<sup>48</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 133; Iakovidis 1970, 195, 273. A similar custom is noticed at Agios Stephanos in Laconia.

<sup>49</sup> Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 21; Gallo 2004, 367. The number of adult-and-child double burials might have been higher in family vaults, if one takes into account that our picture of the number of the deceased interred in these tombs is often severely affected by successive burials, the performance of the second funeral rite, or by looting. With reference to secondary burials, the co-occurrence of child bones alongside adult skeletal remains in heaps of *disiecta membra* or in ossuaries may provide indirect proof for such simultaneous adult-child burials.

<sup>50</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 67.

<sup>51</sup> Paschalidis and McGeorge 2009, 100.

<sup>52</sup> Spyropoulos 1969, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Papadopoulos 1987, 140.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Nordquist 1987, 105; Lewartowski 2000, 23; Pomadère 2009, 202. According to Ingvarsson-Sundström (2008, 137), no male adult and child simultaneous burials have been identified in the LH III mortuary record. More anthropological and DNA analyses will help clarify this issue.

<sup>55</sup> Several instructive examples of LM IIIC cremations have been summarised by Thomatos (2006, 174).

<sup>56</sup> For a description of the cremation rite, see Iakovidis 1970, 31–57 and Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 32, 33, 34. Another cremated infant may be indicated by the discovery of a burnt tooth in the fill of the dromos of tomb 22 (Iakovidis 1970, 31).

<sup>58</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 33, 38, 40, pl. 78e.

<sup>59</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Lewartowski 2000, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Dickinson 1983, 57; Maran 1995, 67–68.

<sup>36</sup> Two of these burials belonged to children 8–9 years old (graves 2 and 7 both of Phase 2a), two between 2–3 years old (graves 9 and 10; 9 of Phase 2a and 10 of Phase 2b), and another pair of unclear age (graves 3 and 12; 3 of Phase 2b and 12 of Phase 2a) (Popham *et al.* 2006a, 52–53, 58, 63; Sherratt 2006, 306; Thomatos 2006, 159).

<sup>37</sup> Dakoronia 1993, 125; Nikolaou 1999; Dakoronia and Kounouklas 2009; Lemos 2012, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Van de Moortel and Zachou 2011, 335–336; Lemos 2012, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Mylonas 1959, 44, 60–61, 156.

<sup>40</sup> Mylonas 1974, 90.

<sup>41</sup> Kilian 1980, 176–177; Iakovidis 1983, 20; Lewartowski 2000, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Taylour and Janko 2008, 122, 127, 134, 144.

<sup>43</sup> Dakaris 1958, 111–112.

<sup>44</sup> Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 18 and note 105.

<sup>45</sup> Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 20.



had burials of children or young adults.<sup>60</sup> Of these grave 24 accommodated a child cremation which was furnished with a LH IIICm krater and a figurine.<sup>61</sup> As opposed to child cremations at the site, infants were buried in pits.<sup>62</sup> This differentiation may well reflect varying attitudes towards age groups and/or other eschatological beliefs.

Interestingly, the cremated remains of a male adult and of a 1 to 4-year old child were found together in the tumulus at Chania, near Mycenae; both cremations were put in a biconical jug covered by a shallow angular bowl, itself set in a circular pit on the floor of the tumulus; the pit was then covered by a rectangular poros block after the burials had taken place.<sup>63</sup> Palaiologou has suggested that the two individuals were buried together, 'even if their death happened at slightly different times. The child enjoyed the protection of the adult, be it male or female, in the afterlife, as is supposed for multiple inhumations in MH cist graves'.<sup>64</sup> A LH IIIC/SubMyc woman-and-child double cremation has been uncovered in pit A in tomb LXII at Elateia-Alonaki.<sup>65</sup> Like Palaiologou, Deger-Jalkotzy has suggested that the double burials identified at the site belonged to mothers with children, 'who either died together or shortly after one another'.<sup>66</sup>

### Marking the grave

Mycenaean child graves are rarely found marked. However, the fact that tomb markers might have been made of some perishable material like wood, or of upright stone slabs or of piles of field stones, or again comprised but a simple stone kerb renders their identification difficult.<sup>67</sup> With reference to LH IIIC infant/child graves, worth noting are the two vessels (one jug and an amphora) that marked cist grave 2 near the Electraean Gates at Thebes<sup>68</sup> and the triangular stone marker that signalled the position of the LH IIIC cist grave in the Prehistoric Cemetery at Mycenae.<sup>69</sup> In addition to their role as *semata*, these markers might have also formed the foci for some kind of post-funerary rites, e.g. libations or offering rituals.<sup>70</sup>

### Funerary and post-funerary rites for little perishers in LH IIIC Greece

Ἀφκιαστο κι αστόλιστο του χάρου δεν σε δίνω':<sup>71</sup> *the preparation of the body, prothesis and mourning*

<sup>60</sup> Piteros 2001.

<sup>61</sup> Piteros 2001, 102, 114; Thomatos 2006, 152.

<sup>62</sup> Piteros 2001, 115; Thomatos 2006, 152.

<sup>63</sup> Palaiologou 2013, 251, 264–265.

<sup>64</sup> Palaiologou 2013, 265.

<sup>65</sup> Deger-Jalkotzy 2013, 224.

<sup>66</sup> Deger-Jalkotzy 2013, 227.

<sup>67</sup> Iakovides 1970, 27; Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 19–20; Lewartowski 2000, 12; Gallou 2004, 367.

<sup>68</sup> Keramopoulos 1917, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Desborough 1954, 259.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 19. In this context it may be worth mentioning the discovery of a large triangular stone between the LH IIIB intramural child grave and the south wall of Room C of the Mycenaean sanctuary at Agios Konstantinos at Methana. Given the limited available space the excavator doubts the use of the stone as a marker (Konsolaki-Giannopoulou 2003, 258).

<sup>71</sup> From the poem 'Ὁ Τάφος' ('The Grave') by K. Palamas (1898).

On the unfortunate occasion of their immature death, LH IIIC children received the customary Mycenaean pre-burial treatment rites. After being washed and anointed, the little bodies would have been dressed and, occasionally, adorned with jewellery, e.g. 'buttons' of clay and steatite,<sup>72</sup> pins of bronze (e.g. Perati 27) and ivory,<sup>73</sup> bronze fibulae (e.g. Perati 19 and Elateia tomb II),<sup>74</sup> finger-rings (e.g. the silver ring from Perati 119),<sup>75</sup> necklaces of seashells<sup>76</sup> and of beads of glass and other various materials,<sup>77</sup> and bracelets (e.g. Perati 80).<sup>78</sup>

Uniquely valuable for the reconstruction of these acts is the funerary preparation scene on a larnax from chamber tomb 3 at Tanagra:<sup>79</sup> this depicts two adult female figures dressing a dead child (identified as such due to its diminutive size), which lies most likely on a funerary *kline* made of reeds (as suggested by the crisscross pattern), flanked by two female mourners (Fig. 1). The child depicted may be identified as a young girl by her calf-length dress. Her face was most probably covered with a funerary mask (probably of textile or leather) that covered only the upper half of the face (to the nose), with a hole cut for the eyes.<sup>80</sup> Lead wire or a woollen/linen thread might have held the mask in place.<sup>81</sup> It appears that the dressing of the young girl has just been finished and the mourners are ready to wrap the corpse in a shroud, indicated as a thin elongated feature above the child. The body would have been then covered from head

<sup>72</sup> This is an enigmatic class of objects and various interpretations have been put forward for their use (Tsountas 1893, 66; Bielefeld 1967, 12–14; Marinatos 1967, 17–18; Immerwahr 1971, 109–110; Iakovides 1977; Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 23–24; Hughes-Brock 1999, 279–280; Protonotariou-Deilaki 1990, 23; Lewartowski 2000, 33–34). Lewartowski (2000, 34) has noticed that in LH IIIC simple graves these 'buttons' are limited to Elis, Phokis and Attica; in Perati a button was found near the head of the child as contrasted to Elis where it is found behind the back of the deceased. When found singly or in pairs I am inclined to interpret them as the heads of pins or as attachment devices used to secure the shroud in place. Their possible use as parts of gaming sets cannot be excluded either.

<sup>73</sup> Iakovides 1969, 25; 1970, 289.

<sup>74</sup> Iakovides 1969, 330; Dimaki 1999, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Iakovides 1969, 418. For the symbolic use of rings, see Hägg 1987, 209 and fn 23.

<sup>76</sup> Iakovides 1970, 66–67, 364–266. Also from tomb 4 at Phodes, Pylona. Seashells are mostly found with child burials in EMyc and LH IIIC times, with the exception of the adult burial from Paros, Koukounaries (Lewartowski 2000, 42; Gallou 2004, 368). Various interpretations have been put forward regarding the purpose of their deposition with infant/child burials, namely their use as playthings (Vermeule 1964, 300; Iakovides 1970, 66, 364–366; Immerwahr 1971, 208), as beads for pendants (Karali 1991; Nordquist 1987, 40), as symbolic substitutes of actual food (Nordquist 1987, 105–106; 1990, 40) and as symbols of fertility and regeneration closely associated with the sea as a source of life (Georgiadis 2006, 100; Konsolaki-Giannopoulou 2003, 267–268).

<sup>77</sup> Hughes-Brock 1999. See also Smith and Dabney 2012. Wooden beads might have also been included.

<sup>78</sup> Iakovides 1970, 296–297.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Spyropoulos 1969, pl. 14b; Immerwahr 1995, fig. 7.2b.

<sup>80</sup> The rendering of the eye on the funerary mask on the Tanagra larnax is similar to that on the gold mask that covered the face of a child in Shaft Grave III in Grave Circle A at Mycenae, as opposed to the closed eyes on the adult masks from Grave Circles A and B at Mycenae. This provides further support of the identification of the diminutive dead figure on the larnax as a child (for the gold masks from Mycenae, see Vermeule 1964, pl. X.B; Mylonas 1983, fig. 20). For the use of funerary masks (of durable or perishable material) in Mycenaean times, see, among others, Laffineur 2012, 12; Whittaker 2014, 169–171; Gallou, in press.

<sup>81</sup> Gallou, in press.

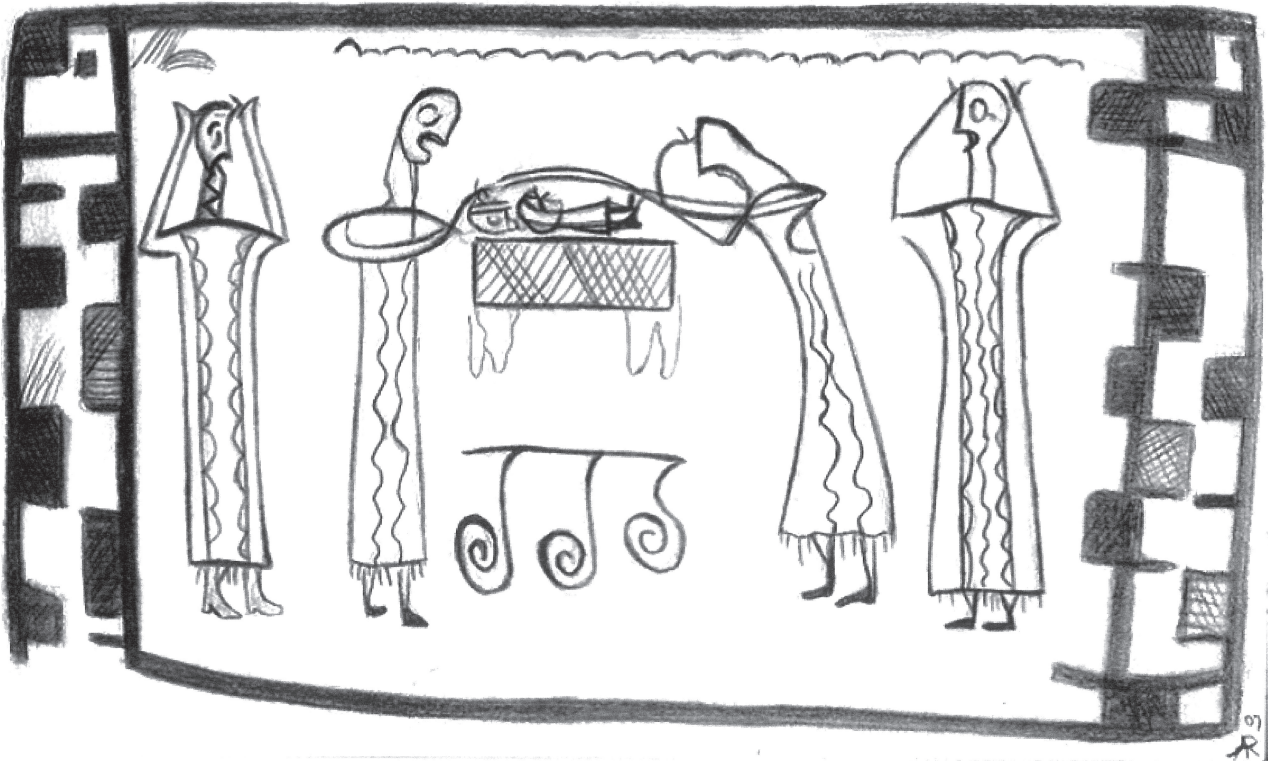


FIG. 1. DRAWING OF SIDE B OF A LARNAX FROM TOMB 3 AT TANAGRA. THIS DEPICTS THE PREPARATION OF A DEAD CHILD FOR BURIAL. (BURKE, 2008, FIG. 4.2).



FIG. 2. DRAWING OF A CHILD'S PROTHESIS SCENE ON THE LOWER PANEL OF THE SHORT END OF A LARNAX FROM TOMB 22 AT TANAGRA. (BURKE 2008, FIG. 4.1).



to toe,<sup>82</sup> as is clearly illustrated in the scene on the lower panel of the short side of a terracotta larnax from chamber tomb 22 at Tanagra, Boeotia (**Fig. 2**).<sup>83</sup> Fastenings for the cloth are suggested by the discovery of pins, lead wire and ‘buttons’ now located with the skeletal remains of the little unfortunates.<sup>84</sup> Golden plaques decorated with the images of children (possibly the deceased) adorned the shroud of a child in the LH IIIC cemetery of Kamini on Naxos.<sup>85</sup>

It may be reasonable to suggest then that the two aforementioned decorative panels illustrate two consecutive episodes of the first stage of funerary ritual, i.e. the washing and dressing of the dead child on the larnax from tomb 3, and the gentle lowering of the shrouded corpse with the aid of a stretcher-like bier into a wooden coffin, as depicted on the larnax from tomb 22. The identification of the receptacle as a wooden coffin derives from the decoration of the frame with rows of white circles: this is reminiscent of a bone lining to a wooden coffin (or box), holding the remains of a LH IIIC intramural foetus or infant burial on the islet of Modi.<sup>86</sup> One cannot now determine whether the mother and/or elderly member(s) of the family (or the village<sup>87</sup>) would have been in charge of the preparation of the body for interment. Given the general emphasis on purity and pollution in Mycenaean society and ritual, though, it may be plausible to suggest that professional mourners, most probably elderly members of the community (witness the hunchbacked female figures with headscarves on the *prothesis* scene from tomb 22; **Fig. 2**) might have been generally tasked to prepare the dead for burial. The washing, dressing, adornment and *prothesis* of these small people would have been accompanied by loud funeral lamentation; although the words sung are lost forever, the pain expressed through lament has been eternally portrayed on the faces of the mourners depicted on the aforementioned larnakes. It is no exaggeration to classify the scene on the larnax from tomb 22 (**Fig. 2**) as ‘the most remarkable and moving representation in Mycenaean art’.<sup>88</sup>

### Funerary gifts

The deposition of funerary gifts with infant/child burials varies from cemetery to cemetery in LH IIIC times, as opposed to the preceding palatial period when the deposition and types of burial offerings followed a more or less uniform pattern. It has been noted that in LH IIIC

times there is a general tendency to offer more gifts to dead children than to adults in chamber tombs.<sup>89</sup> The presence of terracotta feeding bottles, vessels of miniature and standard shapes (wheel-made or handmade), seashells, animal figurines and bird-shaped *askoi* is generally considered as clear indications of a child burial, even in instances where skeletal material is totally absent. The lavishly furnished child burial in Tomb E at Kamini, Naxos, had received six pots including three cups, a kalathos, an alabastron, and a feeding bottle, sixteen gold beads, five gold beads in the shape of a pomegranate, a gold spiral, gold wire, a bead made of bone, five beads of carnelian, three small stone beads, a stone amulet, a broken pin of bone, and four small gold plates with representations of a child figure.<sup>90</sup> At Perati, Iakovides has noticed that sets of burial gifts accompanied the children buried there; in tombs 37 and 56 seashells and a terracotta bovid figurine were found, in tombs 46a, 104, 134 and Σ57a a feeding bottle with seashells, in tomb Σ23a a feeding bottle, seashells and one bird figurine, in tombs 48 and 110 a feeding bottle and one *Psi*-figurine, and in tomb 147 a feeding bottle and bovid figurines.<sup>91</sup> Like Mylonas and other excavators, he, too, adopted the formula *child burials* ↔ *figurines*.<sup>92</sup> However, LH figurines form an enigmatic class of objects which occur in every known archaeological context. They have been variously interpreted as toys, magical, ritual and fertility aids, and their distribution in Mycenaean cemeteries follows regional variations linked with localised patterns of belief.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to chamber tombs, several infant/child *intra muros* burials appear to have received fewer and poorer gifts (if any at all). For example, most of the infant burials at Kynos were unfurnished: only occasionally was a piece of chert, a bead made of fish-bone or a small pebble deposited.<sup>94</sup> The ‘disturbed’ LH IIICe infant burial Eta13 at Agios Stephanos was furnished with a LH IIIA2 lentoid seal of black steatite: the contextual dating of the burial to LH IIICe suggests that the seal was probably an heirloom and might have been given to the child as an amulet. Almost no offerings accompanied the children at Lefkandi, Xeropolis, apart from the pithos fragments (burials 7, 9, 10) and the conical bowl (burial 12) that were set as covers above them.<sup>95</sup> Of course, the term ‘unfurnished’ can be risky both for *intra* and *extra muros* infant/child burials, as one cannot completely rule out the possibility that the grieving parents and siblings might have offered gifts of perishable materials, e.g. jewellery (such as necklaces, finger-rings) made of wood, wooden toys and game pieces, rag dolls, garments, wooden and/or leather vessels and baskets filled with liquids and food,

<sup>82</sup> Traces of linen cloth used as a shroud and/or chin straps have been identified in MH and LH funerary contexts and in direct association with skeletons (cf. Goldman 1931, 223; Deshayes 1966, 243; Catling 2009, 188, ill. 13; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 73; McGeorge 1999, 301–302; Karantzali 2001, 83, 86, 98). Interestingly, the remains from Grave Circle B belonged to a shroud made of papyrus (Andreopoulou-Mangou 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Vermeule 1979, fig. 20; Immerwahr 1995, fig. 7.2a.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Keramopoulos 1917, 29–30; Iakovides 1969, 330, 453; 1970, 289, 366; Iakovides 1977; Polychronakou-Sgouritsa 1987, 20; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Vlachopoulos 2006, 277–284.

<sup>86</sup> For the burial on Modi, see Konsolaki-Giannopoulou 2007, 176, fig. 25. For the use of wooden coffins in LBA Greece, see Hägg and Sieurin 1982, 177–186; Mårtensson 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Immerwahr 1995, 110.

<sup>88</sup> Immerwahr 1995, 110.

<sup>89</sup> Iakovides 1970, 66.

<sup>90</sup> Vlachopoulos 2006, 432–436.

<sup>91</sup> Iakovides 1970, 66.

<sup>92</sup> Mylonas 1966, 114; Mylonas 1975, 251; Iakovides 1970, 265–272. For a summary of the various views on the deposition of figurines in Mycenaean tombs, Gallou 2005, 52ff.

<sup>93</sup> See among many other studies, Cavanagh 1998, 113; Tzonou-Herbst 2002; 2009; Gallou 2005, 153ff.; French 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Nikolaou 1999, 153. Note also the long series of transitional LH IIIB2–LH IIICe unfurnished child burials on the Lower Citadel at Tiryns.

<sup>95</sup> Popham *et al.* 2006a, 52–53, 70; Popham *et al.* 2006b, 167, 170.

and flowers: none of which would have left a trace in the archaeological record.

Finally, the eschatological beliefs of the living community and their concern for the protection and wellbeing of the child in the afterlife are reflected not just in the deposition of the terracotta anthropomorphic figurines in the grave, but also in the offering of amulets and plaques to their little ones: for example, the stone amulet in burial 2 at Lefkandi, Xeropolis,<sup>96</sup> the Egyptian scarab and cartouche from Perati tombs 90 and 104 respectively,<sup>97</sup> the gold plaques from Kamini<sup>98</sup> and possibly the steatite pendants from Elateia.<sup>99</sup> These objects might have held protective and apotropaic qualities for the Mycenaeans.

### The final act of the drama: Secondary burial treatment

This post-funerary custom does not appear to have changed dramatically from the preceding palatial period. LH IIIC child burials received the customary secondary treatment just as did adults.<sup>100</sup> At Perati the custom was so systematically performed that only 13 adult and 6 child burials were left intact, that is only 19 out of the nearly 500 burials in the cemetery.<sup>101</sup> The *disiecta membra* of the little occupant of tomb 27 were re-deposited in a shallow pit-ossuary within the burial chamber, mixed with few ivory scrapings.<sup>102</sup> The large inverted *lekane* that covered the pit-ossuary might have been used in the post-funerary ceremonies in honour of the child.<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusions

The loss of a child is a deeply moving, personal experience and the 'most poignant reminder of our inherent powerlessness in the world and our own transience'.<sup>104</sup> The evidence from LH IIIC infant and child burials suggests that the adult community cared deeply when their children died.<sup>105</sup> The available archaeological data constitute a valuable part of the post-palatial emotive and embodied experience. In this period of disruption to daily life, of population movements and migration, desertion, re-settlement and re-organisation,<sup>106</sup> the high child mortality rate, although not always directly attested to archaeologically, and the declining population would have rendered the lives of children extremely valuable. The loss of a child would have meant the loss of descendants and possibly an ominous future for the family or the clan, both in social and economic terms.<sup>107</sup> The provision of dead

children with the appropriate funerary and post-funerary rites, a final resting place and funerary gifts, would have helped the surviving family and the local community to come in terms with the loss, to secure the protection and wellbeing of their offspring in the afterlife, and to ascribe meaning to foreshortened lives and premature deaths.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the placing of children in intramural graves may be explained as 'a form of sympathetic magic, a statement that the household welcomes children; or a mark of the parents' unwillingness to give up a treasured child completely'.<sup>109</sup> The mourning scenes on the Tanagra larnakes and the surviving evidence, even the scantiest remains, convey but a hint of the unspeakable pain felt by the grieving parents and relatives at the time of the burial. How many 'Whys?' would have been uttered over these tiny graves?

At the same time, LH IIIC society was one of transition, in which new forms of socio-political and economic organisation and competition were developing. The emerging socio-political realities then would have been governed by specifics of genealogy, descent and ancestry. In this ideological framework fewer children would have meant fewer descendants for the competing elite families, thus fewer chances for claims of authority and succession to political power. In this case the death of a child could have been an occasion for competitive display. Thus, the offering of a wealth of burial gifts, of *exotica*, or of objects made of precious materials (as in the case of Perati, and Kamini, Naxos), and the elaborate construction of sepulchres for children and their direct association with graves of adult members of the local elite (as, for example, in the case of the two well-constructed child graves at Mitrou) would have been stage-managed to advertise the prominent social status of the living family within the community, and/or the involvement of the *pater familias* into the regional and interregional prestige exchange networks of the period, and/or the family's ancestral links with the glorious palatial past (as may be reflected by the deposition of heirlooms in the graves of their offspring).

The analysis of the surviving evidence suggests that it is possible to reach Mycenaean children and their world through archaeology. The LH IIIC response to the death of a child was not always simply emotional; a 'tiny' death would have also presented an ideal opportunity for the advertisement of power and social prominence, the (re) production of ideas of heredity, lineal descent and ancestry, and subsequently, the renewal, reinforcement and even reclassification of socio-political roles in a society in transition.

palatial one, children would have been active economic contributors, supplying the household and the village with much needed labour (cf. Gallou 2010).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Parker Pearson 1999, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Golden 1988, 156. For a summary of other views, see Gallou 2004, 370 and Sjöberg 2004, 105–106.

<sup>96</sup> Popham *et al.* 2006a, 58.

<sup>97</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 312ff.

<sup>98</sup> Vlachopoulos 2006, 277–284.

<sup>99</sup> Dimaki 1999.

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the associated rites in Mycenaean times, see Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 76, 116; Gallou 2005, 113–114.

<sup>101</sup> Iakovidis 1970, 75.

<sup>102</sup> Iakovidis 1969, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Iakovidis 1969, 25, 26 (no. 326). For the significance of the Mycenaean custom to place inverted vessels with secondary burials, Gallou, in press.

<sup>104</sup> Meskell 1994, 43.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Golden 1988 versus Hertz 1907, 132ff.

<sup>106</sup> At least during the early and late phases of the period.

<sup>107</sup> It should not be forgotten that in a self-sufficient society like the post-

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## Abbreviations

EMyc = Early Mycenaean  
LBA = Late Bronze Age  
LH = Late Helladic  
LM = Late Minoan  
MH = Middle Helladic  
SubMyc = SubMycenaean  
*e* = early  
*l* = late  
*m* = middle

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